

Appendix One

Excerpts from an on-line discussion among MIT students:

We talk about making school safe for all every day, and that means the geeks, too.

Is it so wrong for everyone to be safe from getting picked on?

Speaking from personal experience, the geeks & nerds who do conform are survivalists, and the rest of the geeks & nerds individualists.

And the conforming geeks/nerds are still very lonely.

Personally, I think teachers and other adult mentors really play a big role in preventing most geeks & nerds from going over the edge and blow up the schools. From my own experience, without all of my teachers' support, I might have went ahead and blew up the school myself, too.

The human mind seeks attention anyway it could get. Being inventive & ingenuous, man goes into many niches over his lifetime in his quest for recognition. It is because of this quality that we have as colorful & varied society as we do today.

And it is also this quality that drove a significant portion of the high schoolers into dressing all black & listening to alternative music.

And, unfortunately, it is also this quality that drove the jocks & others into picking upon these other alternative people in school.

Most of the people I'm really close to were bullied/abused/harassed to the point of tears, drugs, therapy, suicidal thoughts, anger, hatred, etc. throughout our lives in school, both public and private. However, none of us killed anyone. In my case, it certainly wasn't due to lack of weapons. In high school, we had guns in the house, locked in a safe to which I had the combo, and I went to the shooting range with my father. I had a recurring fantasy of cutting off the hair of the girl who's locker was next to mine, because she fucking brushed it in my face every fucking day. But I didn't kill her. Why not? Part of it is the timing of certain influences. I had really supportive older sisters. One of my friends had an older brother whom he worshipped who became a militantly racist skinhead, and he followed right along. I was deeply disappointed at what I considered the loss of that friend.

Anyway, personal anecdotes aside, I think the abuse that goes on in schools played a part in this. I hate the fact that this is written off as a normal part of adolescence. The "concerned adults" involved should think about preventing this abuse, rather than waiting until these kids are on the verge of actually snapping before they intervene. Also, I think there was something much more fundamentally wrong with these kids, either with their home lives and influences, some inherent mental problems, or both.

I think the fundamental part of my existence has always been an intense feeling of isolation, which manifested itself in all my different phases of

conformity.

Teased from a young age simply because the kids knew they could get a rise out of me- I tried and tried to be like everyone else. Got the Gap pants, the jean jacket and everything. Purposefully did average on spelling tests and the like. I'd always be accepted for a little while, then it'd become apparent that I was somehow different (maybe I tried too hard) then the circle would come full round and I'd get ostracized.

Once I joined the jocks, once the punk rockers, once the drama kids, once the college students, once the towers club, whatever.

It didn't ever come down to expression of the self. It was always a desire to connect with others. And it still pervades my actions. And I still feel isolated. Although admittedly, MIT (and my own personal achievements) has given me just enough of an ego to be able to say "Fuck You" and not let the isolation affect me. But hey, I still cry about it.

I kind of empathize with the Col. kids....To do what they did, they couldn't have been part of any group, not even trench-coat wearing doom players (I was one of those kids once too), they were completely alone. (and maybe they suffered from some major chemical imbalance too)

Those of you in the house that know me at all and especially those of you that have seen me in person lately know that something like this thing in Colorado would've and did bother me a lot.

A couple of words on it:

1) I have to start by saying that it was an utterly atrocious and despicable series of acts that would've made me happy to see the gunmen be executed if they hadn't already killed themselves.

2) However, a number of things about the whole incident have been bothering me. To begin with, the media coverage of the incident has made me so outraged I've barely been able to restrain myself. I have never been so angered by the combination of poor journalism (in lack of proper facts), buzzword use, and general tastelessness.

The first two of these issues are incredibly apparent in the media's depiction of the gunmen. Immediately, the gunmen were completely bogusly classified as "goths" simply because they wore black trenchcoats and supposedly listened to Marilyn Manson. This is the most absurd thing I could've ever imagined. If wearing black trenchcoats made one goth or a killer, then half of Boston in the winter time are crazied goth maniacs. Additionally, if the media had done even a modicum of research, they would've learned that Marilyn Manson is so far from goth it's ridiculous. This is like saying Gwar, White Zombie, Tool, or hell, Dolly Parton is goth. This instant "goth" classification was replicated throughout the media and spread like wild fire. It's kind of interesting, with a few rare exceptions (such an article today in the NY Post), no retraction of this error was made. BTW, as an aside, numerous goth boys and girls at high schools all over the U.S. today were ridiculed and beaten up even more than usual...I doubt you'll hear anything about that either.

But besides the extreme slandering of goths, not only was the goth

subculture dragged out as the whipping boy on this one...here's a partial list of everything else I've heard it blamed on:

- *) Marilyn Manson
- *) KMFDM
- *) Hitler and the Nazis
- *) anarchism
- *) role-playing games (again...man, feels like the 80s again, no?)
- *) guns
- *) computer games
- *) trench coats
- *) gangster rap

And a dozen other of the media's favorite whipping boys.

The media also couldn't have been more tacky and tasteless. The very next day on the NY Times website, a virtual walk through of the Columbine high school marking rooms where the gunmen killed people was on line. Am I the only one who finds this incredibly in poor taste?! Also, the very next day, every talk show was doing a special on the shootings, from Oprah to Leeza, and so forth. And from the snippets I saw of any of them, they were all so ridiculously manipulative of the sad emotions surrounding the incident for ratings it was sickening.

3) Certain issues regarding the incident have been bugging me a lot, and actually kept me near sleepless on some issues. Here's the thing, I, like a couple others of you I suspect, was horribly made fun of in school. For eleven years of my life, I was the subject of nearly constant ridicule, remarks, physical violence, you name it. I was every bully's wet dream -- a little scrawny kid with red hair, braces, freckles, glasses, the works. And thinking back, I do remember numerous times throughout my youth when while being mocked, ridiculed, tortured, whatever, that I thought to myself "man, I'm gonna kill that sucker".

So what made me different than these kids in Colorado? Why *didn't* I flip out and go on a killing spree, and why *did* they? This seems like a deceptively simple question at first -- "they were sickos" -- but it really isn't. I mean it's like the old bumper sticker someone pointed out to me recently: "Bigots aren't born bigots." Now, while I place almost all the blame of the incident on the two gunmen, I still have to wonder... What events occurred in my life that prevented me from doing something like this that didn't occur in theirs? Or vice versa, what events occurred in their lives that I never encountered that made them lash out in the manner they did? It really isn't a simple question...

4) Finally, ever since the incident, every single time I turn on the TV, there's another psychologist talking about: a) how he saw it coming, but no one would listen to him, b) the "warning signs" if your kid might be ready to snap and turn violent. Now, quite frankly, when I heard about this, I wasn't too surprised. I was shocked at the size of it, and I will always be utterly disgusted by the entire incident, but I wasn't too surprised...I seem to hear about incidents like this every week with just a much lower body count. However, it's the (b) of above that bothers me the most.

I get a sick feeling whenever I see these cheap 2-bit psychologists tell the warning signs of your child is going to snap and whatever show their on puts

in on the air with some slick computer graphics. For not only are they incredibly broad and encompassing, such that almost everyone I know fits them, they are completely the wrong goal. Why does no one understand that when these incidents happen time and time again, in each case, the kids doing this are in massive amounts of pain from something and incredibly angry about something. Parents and teachers shouldn't be looking for "once these students are in pain and troubled, here's some signs that they might snap", instead, it should be a step before that. There should be warning signs for "the student is starting to become hurt and angry" (ie., not once he's hurt and angry, THEN trying to look for those that might lash out violently).

The mind set is just completely wrong.

Appendix Two

Posted by Jon Katz on Monday April 26, @12:26PM EDT

In the days after the Littleton, Colorado massacre, the country went on a panicked hunt the oddballs in High School, a profoundly ignorant and unthinking response to a tragedy that left geeks, nerds, non-conformists and the alienated in an even worse situation than before. Stories all over the country embarked on witch hunts that amounted to little more than Geek Profiling. All weekend, after Friday's column here, these voiceless kids -- invisible in media and on TV talk shows and powerless in their own schools -- have been e-mailing me with stories of what has happened to them in the past few days. Here are some of those stories in their own words, with gratitude and admiration for their courage in sending them. The big story out of Littleton isn't about violence on the Internet, or whether or not video games are turning out kids into killers. It's about the fact that for some of the best, brightest and most interesting kids, high school is a nightmare of exclusion, cruelty, warped values and anger.

The big story never seemed to quite make it to the front pages or the TV talk shows. It wasn't whether the Net is a place for hate-mongers and bomb-makers, or whether video games are turning your kids into killers. It was the spotlight the Littleton, Colorado killings has put on the fact that for so many individualistic, intelligent, and vulnerable kids, high school is a Hellmouth of exclusion, cruelty, loneliness, inverted values and rage.

From Buffy the Vampire Slayer to Todd Solondz's "Welcome To The Dollhouse," and a string of comically-bitter teen movies from Hollywood, pop culture has been trying to get this message out for years. For many kids - often the best and brightest -- school is a nightmare.

People who are different are reviled as geeks, nerds, dorks. The lucky ones are excluded, the unfortunates are harassed, humiliated, sometimes assaulted literally as well as socially. Odd values - unthinking school spirit, proms, jocks - are exalted, while the best values - free thinking, non-conformity, curiosity - are ridiculed. Maybe the one positive legacy the Trenchcoat Mafia left was to ensure that this message got heard, by a society that seems desperate not to hear it.

Minutes after the "Kids That Kill" column was posted on Slashdot Friday, and all through the weekend, I got a steady stream of e-mail from middle and high school kids all over the country -- especially from self-described oddballs. They were in trouble, or saw themselves that way to one degree or another in the hysteria sweeping the country after the shootings in Colorado.

Many of these kids saw themselves as targets of a new hunt for oddballs -- suspects in a bizarre, systematic search for the strange and the alienated. Suddenly, in this tyranny of the normal, to be different wasn't just to feel unhappy, it was to be dangerous.

Schools all over the country openly embraced Geek Profiling. One group calling itself the National School Safety Center issued a checklist of "dangerous signs" to watch for in kids: it included mood swings, a fondness for violent TV or video games, cursing, depression, anti-social behavior and attitudes. (I don't know about you, but I bat a thousand).

The panic was fueled by a ceaseless bombardment of powerful, televised images of mourning and grief in Colorado, images that stir the emotions and demand some sort of response, even when it isn't clear what the problem is.

The reliably blockheaded media response didn't help either. "Sixty Minutes" devoted a whole hour to a broadcast on screen violence and its impact on the young, heavily promoted by this tease: "Are video games turning your kids into killers?" The already embattled loners were besieged.

"This is not a rational world. Can anybody help?" asked Jamie, head of an intense Dungeons and Dragons club in Minnesota, whose private school guidance counselor gave him a choice: give up the game or face counseling, possibly suspension. Suzanne Angelica (her online handle) was told to go home and leave her black, ankle-length raincoat there.

On the Web, kids did flock to talk to each other. On Star Wars and X-Files mailing lists and websites and on AOL chat rooms and ICQ message boards, teenagers traded countless countless stories of being harassed, beaten, ostracized and ridiculed by teachers, students and administrators for dressing and thinking differently from the mainstream. Many said they had some understanding of why the killers in Littleton went over the edge.

"We want to be different," wrote one of the Colorado killers in a diary found by the police. "We want to be strange and we don't want jocks or other people putting us down." The sentiment, if not the response to it, was echoed by kids all over the country. The Littleton killings have made their lives much worse.

"It was horrible, definitely," e-mailed Bandy from New York City. "I'm a Quake freak, I play it day and night. I'm really into it. I play Doom a lot too, though not so much anymore. I'm up till 3 a.m. every night. I really love it. But after Colorado, things got horrible. People were actually talking to me like I could come in and kill them. It wasn't like they were really afraid of me - they just seemed to think it was okay to hate me even more? People asked me if I had guns at home. This is a whole new level of exclusion, another excuse for the preppies of the universe to put down and isolate people like me."

It wasn't just the popular who were suspicious of the odd and the alienated, though.

The e-mailed stories ranged from suspensions and expulsions for "anti-social behavior" to censorship of student publications to school and parental restrictions on computing, Web browsing, and especially gaming. There were unconfirmed reports that the sale of blocking software had skyrocketed. Everywhere, school administrators pandered and panicked, rushing to show they were highly sensitive to parents fears, even if they were oblivious to the needs and problems of many of their students.

In a New Jersey private school, a girl was expelled for showing classmates a pocket-knife. School administrators sent a letter home:

"In light of the recent tragedy in Littleton, Colorado, we all share a heightened sensitivity to potential threats to our children. I urge you to take this time to discuss with your children the importance of turning to adults when they have concerns about the behavior of others."

This solution was straight out of "1984." In fact, this was one of the things its protagonist Winston was jailed for: refusing to report his friends for behavior that Big Brother deemed abnormal and disturbing.

Few of the weeks? media reports - in fact, none that I saw - pointed out that the FBI Uniform

Crime reports, issued bi-annually, along with the Justice Departments reports (statistical abstracts on violence are available on the Department's website and in printed form) academic studies and some news reports have reporters for years now.

Violence among the young is dropping across the country, even as computing, gaming, cable TV and other media use rises.

Unhappy, alienated, isolated kids are legion in schools, voiceless in media, education and politics. But theirs are the most important voices of all in understanding what happened and perhaps even how to keep it from happening again.

I referred some of my e-mailers to peacefire.org, a children's rights website, for help in dealing with blocking and filtering software. I sent others to freedomforum.org (the website Free!) for help with censorship and free speech issues, and to geek websites, especially some on ICQ.com where kids can talk freely.

I've chosen some e-mailers to partially reprint here. Although almost all of these correspondents were willing to be publicly identified - some demanded it - I'm only using their online names, since some of their stories would put them in peril from parents, peers or school administrators.

From Jay in the Southeast:

"I stood up in a social studies class -the teacher wanted a discussion -- and said I could never kill anyone or condone anyone who did kill anyone. But that I could, on some level, understand these kids in Colorado, the killers. Because day after day, slight after slight, exclusion after exclusion, you can learn how to hate, and that hatred grows and takes you over sometimes, especially when you come to see that you're hated only because you're smart and different, or sometimes even because you are online a lot, which is still sound cool to many kids?

After the class, I was called to the principal's office and told that I had to agree to undergo five sessions of counseling or be expelled from school, as I had expressed 'sympathy' with the killers in Colorado, and the school had to be able to explain itself if I 'acted out'. In other words, for speaking freely, and to cover their ass, I was not only branded a weird geek, but a potential killer. That will sure help deal with violence in America."

From Jason in Pennsylvania: "The hate just eats you up, like the molten metal moving up Keanu Reeve's arm in the The Matrix. That's what I thought of when I saw it. You lose track of what is real and what isn't. The worst people are the happiest and do the best, the best and smartest people are the most miserable and picked upon. The cruelty is unimaginable. If Dan Rather wants to know why those guys killed those people in Littleton, Colorado, tell him for me that the kids who run the school probably drove them crazy, bit by bit?.That doesn't mean all those kids deserved to die. But a lot of kids in America know why it happened, even if the people running schools don't."

From Andrew in Alaska: "To be honest, I sympathized much more with the shooters than the shootees. I am them.

They are me. This is not to say I will end the lives of my classmates in a hail of bullets, but that their former situation bears a striking resemblance to my own. For the most part, the media are clueless. They're never experienced social rejection, or chosen non-conformity'Also, I would like to postulate that the kind of measures taken by school administration have a direct effect on school violence. School is generally an oppressive place; the parallels to fascist society are tantalizing. Following a school shooting, a week or two-week crackdown ensues, where students' constitutional rights are violated with impunity, at a greater rate than previous."

From Anika78 in suburban Chicago:

"I was stopped at the door of my high school because I was wearing a trenchcoat. I don't game, but I'm a geekchick, and I'm on the Web a lot. (I love geek guys, and there aren't many of us.) I was given a choice - go home and ditch the coat, or go to the principal. I refused to go home. I have never been a member of any group or trenchcoat mob or any hate thing, online or any other, so why should they tell me what coat to wear?

Two security guards took me into an office, called the school nurse, who was a female, and they ordered me to take my coat off. The nurse asked me to undress (privately) while the guards outside the door went through every inch of my coat. I wouldn't undress, and she didn't make me (I think she felt creepy about the whole thing).

Then I was called into the principal's office and he asked me if I was a member of any hate group, or any online group, or if I had ever played Doom or Quake. He mentioned some other games, but I don't remember them. I'm not a gamer, though my boyfriends have been. I lost it then. I thought I was going to be brave and defiant, but I just fell apart. I cried and cried. I think I hated that worse than anything."

FromZBird in New Jersey:

"Yeah, I've had some fantasies about taking out some of these jerks who run the school, have parties, get on teams, are adored by teachers, have all these friends. Sure. They hate me. Day by day, it's like they take pieces out of you, like a torture, one at a time. My school has 1,500 kids. I could never make a sports team. I have never been to a party. I sit with my friends at our own corner of the cafeteria. If we tried to join the other kids, they'd throw up or leave. And by now, I'd rather die.

Sometimes, I do feel a lot of real pure rage. And I feel better when I go online. Sometimes I think the games keep me from shooting anybody, not the other way around. Cause I can get even there, and I'm pretty powerful there. But I'd never do it. Something much deeper was wrong with these kids in Colorado. To shoot all those people? Make bombs? You have to be sick, and the question they should be asking isn't what games do they play, but how come all these high-paid administrators, parents, teachers and so-called professional people, how come none of them noticed how wacked they were? I mean, in the news it said they had guns all over their houses! They were planning this for a year. Maybe the reporters ought to ask how come nobody noticed this, instead of writing all these stupid stories about video games?"

From ES in New York:

High school favors people with a certain look and attitude - the adolescent equivalent of Aryans. They are the chosen ones, and they want to get rid of anyone who doesn't look and think the way they do. One of the things which makes this so infuriating is that the system favors shallow people. Anyone who took the time to think about things would realize that things like the prom, school spirit and who won the football game are utterly insignificant in the larger scheme of things.

So anyone with depth of thought is almost automatically excluded from the main high school social structure. It's like some horribly twisted form of Social Darwinism.

I would never, ever do anything at all like what was done in Colorado. I can't understand how anyone could. But I do understand the hatred of high school life which, I guess, prompted it.

From Dan in Boise, Idaho:

"Be careful! I wrote an article for my school paper. The advisor suggested we write about ?our feelings? About Colorado. My feelings -what I wrote -- were that society is blaming the wrong things. You can't blame screwed-up kids or the Net. These people don't know what they were talking about. How bout blaming a system that takes smart or weird kids and drives them crazy? How about understanding why these kids did what they did, cause in some crazy way, I feel something for them. For their victims, too, but for them. I thought it was a different point-of-view, but important. I was making a point. I mean, I'm not going to the prom.

You know what? The article was killed, and I got sent home with a letter to my parents. It wasn't in official suspension, but I can't go back until Tuesday. And it was made pretty clear to me that if I made any noise about it, it would be a suspension or worse. So this is how they are trying to blaming a sub-culture and not thinking about their own roles, about how fucked-up school is. Now, I think the whole thing was a set-up, cause a couple of other kids are being questioned too, about what they wrote. They pretend to want to have a 'dialogue' but kids should be warned that what they really want to know is who's dangerous to them."

From a Slashdot reader:

"Your column Friday was okay, but you and a lot of the Slashdot readers don't get it. You don't have the guts to stand up and say these games are not only not evil, they are great. They are good. They are challenging and stimulating. They help millions of kids who have nowhere else to go, because the whole world is set up to take care of different kinds of kids, kids who fit in, who do what they're told, who are popular. I've made more friends online on Gamespot.com than I have in three years of high school. I think about my characters and my competitions and battles all day.

Nothing I've been taught in school interests me as much. And believe me, the gamers who (try to) kill me online all day are a lot closer to me than the kids I go to high school with. I'm in my own world, for sure, but it's my choice and it's a world I love. Without it, I wouldn't have one... Last week, my father told me he had cancelled my ISP because he had asked me not to game so much and I still was. And when he saw the Colorado thing online, he said, he told my Mom that he felt one of these kids could be me. I am a resourceful geek, and I was back online before he got to bed that night. But I have to go underground now.

My guidance counselor, who wouldn't know a computer game from Playboy Bunny poster, told me was Dad was being a good parent, and here was a chance for me to re-invent myself, be more popular, to ?mainstream.? This whole Colorado thing, it's given them an excuse to do more of what started this trouble in the first place - to make individuals and different people feel like even bigger freaks."

From Jip in New England:

"Dear Mr. Katz. I am 10. My parents took my computer away today, because of what they saw on television. They told me they just couldn't be around enough to make sure that I'm doing the right things on the Internet. My Mom and Dad told me they didn't want to be standing at my funeral some day because of things I was doing that they didn't know about. I am at my best friend's house, and am pretty bummed, because things are boring now. I hope I'll get it back."

Appendix Three

Text taken from <http://hsunderground.com>

The Littleton Massacre

The recent massacre in Littleton, Colorado has brought into the public eye the troubles that disaffected

high school students face, and the serious disaster that can take place when outcast students are not provided with a means to legally and responsibly express their frustration.

Many pundits and policymakers have spoken at length about what they would like to do to prevent a similar massacre again in the future. None of it, however, has treated the cause -- they all have been treating the symptoms.

Banning trenchcoats in Denver schools will not turn disaffected outcast rebellious teenagers into straight productive members of society. Having been driven underground the disaffected classes are more likely to explode in a destructive manner such as the Littleton massacre.

Banning bizarre behavior also does not solve any problems. As with banning trenchcoats, restricting free expression only serves to repress the students' urges to express themselves. These urges can then explode into destructive behavior.

Passing more regulations on firearms will not prevent another massacre. The gunmen violated nineteen federal laws. No additional laws will prevent a massacre such as this. Liberalized concealed carry laws would probably help mitigate a disaster.

The gunmen in the Littleton massacre were outcast students who did not have any productive means to express their opinions. They were poked fun at and did not have enough of a feeling of self-worth in order to handle the abuse without becoming violent.

In order to prevent future massacres of this kind, students must be given outlets to express themselves in non-violent ways. Students such as the Littleton gunmen will not be satisfied with conventional mainstream mode of expression such as writing for the school newspaper or joining student council, because they hold non-mainstream beliefs.

When I was in high school I was often persecuted for my beliefs. Luckily, I came from a background which taught me to respect myself and I did not buckle under the pressure of the persecution. Rather than buckling, I spoke out and published a newsletter within my high school in order to educate, inform, and most of all, satisfy my need to be heard and make a mark. I acted completely legally, although I did make a few mistakes along the way which I regret.

Other students in different situations will have different ways to solve these problems within their own communities. I have decided to found this High School Underground site in order to help inspire students around the country to use their frustrated energies and start doing something with them -- in particular, publishing underground publications within their local high school community.

Appendix Four

URLS for websites that offer goth responses to the shootings or offer an explanation of the goth subculture.

<http://www.cedep.net/~kryptik/definegoth.html>

<http://www.blarg.net/~icprncs/gothu.html>

<http://www.gothic.net/~mayfair/trenchcoat>

<http://lexicon.psy.tufts.edu/gothic/primer.html>

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/6678/gothpage.htm>

<http://www.gothic.net/benefit>

<http://www.gothic.net/~mayfair/trenchcoat>

<http://www.gothic.net/%7Emage/goth/scouts/state>